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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

October, 1890.

QUESTION LXXVI.

To be a good Theosophist, is it necessary to believe actively in Occultism? I mean: If a man feels the ennobling influence of the philosophy of Theosophy and endeavors to live by it, is it absolutely necessary for his profit and development to do more than believe that certain occult facts are facts, while he personally dislikes Occultism and avoids it in any form, finding Theosophic teachings sufficient to him without it?

Ans.—Active participation in Occult pursuits is assuredly not necessary to constitute a good Theosophist. A good Theosophist is accurately defined by the Questioner as a man who "feels the ennobling influence of the philosophy of Theosophy and endeavors to live by it." In other words, he believes the doctrine, he respires the stimulus, he lives the life. If all men did so, this would be a different world, and it would be a Theosophic world.

The relation of true Occultism to true Theosophy is that of a more advanced stage. Now it cannot be said of any man that it is his duty to occupy a more advanced stage than that for which he is at the time fitted. He would inevitably fail if

he attempted it, and no sound system counsels attempts wherein failure is certain. A Sophomore in College could not maintain himself in the Junior class, for he does not belong there. His present position expresses the degree of his study, training, and equipment.

There are two facts as to the Theosophic course which need often to be re-stated. The first is that a man well under the Theosophic influence has not encountered it for the first time in this incarnation. That the spiritual principle has thus much asserted itself is proof that it acquired both consciousness and vigor in time past, and therefore that some steps—not definable, yet certain—were made heretofore. This principle does not suddenly mature in one earth-life: it has had its long previous eras of incipience and expansion. Hence, a sincere Theosophist has the right to look back to a past undoubtedly made up of stages, and to assure himself that it contained the germ of what is now blossoming.

But blossom is not fruit. It is the promise of it. And so the very state of things which verifies a previous experience verifies also one to come. Hence the second fact is that a man well under the Theosophic influence must expect a further and analogous development. As he has emerged from indifference into Theosophy, so he will emerge from Theosophy into Occultism. Many incarnations were necessary for the former; many may be necessary for the latter. *But the end is sure.* The evolutionary process was not intended simply to transform savages into civilized, civilized into enlightened, enlightened into Theosophists; but to transform Theosophists into Occultists, Occultists into Masters, Masters into Nirmanakayas, Nirmanakayas into Planetary Spirits, Planetary Spirits into Gods. Stupendous as the process may be, we need not shirk its contemplation if we realize its truth.

Nor should we shirk it. The fact that Occultism may be at present personally distasteful is not evidence that it always will be so, or that this is anything more than a transient stage of feeling. It is not a discreditable one, for the simultaneous and equal evolution of all interests is not exacted of anybody; but the deliberate cultivation of antipathy to any one of the

steps which Nature points out as constituting her ascent would be discreditable, as being irrational. It would be opposing sentiment to fact, and the fallible mind to the infallible mind. But, on the other hand, no one could be reasonably expected to galvanize an interest which was not normal, or to force himself into habits or practices both uncongenial and premature. If he dislikes Occultism, it would be a mistake to suppose that duty calls him to be an Occultist, and an injury to undertake response to such a call. The time has not yet come. Very evidently he has reached that stage where the Theosophic life, with its amplitude of motive and stimulus and altruistic endeavor, gives full scope for all energy and devotion, and in the effectuation of it he may feel secure that he is doing all that duty exacts or reason warrants. When, hereafter, he reaches the stage of interest in Occultism, he will feel the same impulse to the Occult life that he now feels to the Theosophic life.

W. Q. J.—The questioner has either heard from others or read that a good Theosophist *must* believe that Occultism is our highest goal as members of the T. S. Such is not the truth. At present "the T. S. is not," as an Adept once wrote to Mr. Sinnett, "a hall for teaching Occultism," although that is pursued by some. It is a Society meant for the giving of true views of life and of Nature to a suffering race which otherwise would sink into a spiritual death brought on by the joint efforts of materialists and theologians. Hence, at present, the true Theosophist is the true Altruist who sinks his personal desires for progress in a secret and fascinating art, so that he may give this true view of life, of death, and of immortality to as many of his fellow-men as he can reach. Many members of our Society, dazzled by the wonders of Occultism, have hastily taken up its study without realizing that it is something that demands not only will but wide intellect and unflinching memory; and many have failed as many others will.

QUESTION LXXVII.

F. T. S. using tobacco defend the habit as having certain qualities

very protective in studying Occultism. Is this true; and, if so, why is it incompatible with one of the five precepts taught by the Lord Buddha, viz: "Shun drugs and drinks that work the wit abuse; Clear minds, clean bodies need no soma juice"? And is it not possible to educate the will, the spiritual will, to resist effectually everything which this deleterious weed tends to annul, if it does annul?

S. E. M.—I should be very glad to have the FORUM give these questions full attention. As one brought up from childhood free from its infection, free from inheriting or in any way transmitting its poison, I may be prejudiced in meeting it. But it seems inconsistent for Theosophists to abjure all wines, liquors, etc., all flesh, fish, and fowl (life, to be sure), and give this detestable habit full sway, unless it is to cater to selfish desire, and this I know to be un-Theosophical.

Ans.—Great vehemence in denunciation of what one does not oneself like or is unaccustomed to is, as you jnstly say, evidence of prejudice. It is even open to two further objections. One is that by using such words as "detestable" and "poison," the question at issue is assumed. The other is that unbridled emotion runs serious risk of bathos. Some years ago an excited tract against smoking by clergymen averred that "dying saints, well nigh suffocated by the poisonous odor, have with trembling hands waved pastors from their bedsides. Humiliating fact!" You may have escaped bathos, though hardly on firm rhetorical ground yet. What do you mean by the will resisting what tobacco tends to annul? If tobacco tends to annul spirituality or self-conquest, is the will to resist spirituality and self-conquest? Moreover, is it the fact that Theosophists abjure wine and flesh? *Some* do, no doubt, but not all; any more than that all use tobacco, or give the habit full sway, or get muddled in expressing their ideas. Besides, how do you *know* that it is untheosophical to cater to selfish desire, provided that the desire is legitimate, invades no one else's rights, and is kept within bounds? Are we to taboo everything that is pleasant merely because it is pleasant, and cultivate perversity as a Theosophic virtue? Calm yourself; clarify your thought; perceive that

your likes and dislikes do not express the full range of human liberty; and digest the following facts.

A universal use implies a universal want. Now, all over the earth, in nations otherwise most unlike, tobacco or its equivalent is found and enjoyed, not by the dissolute only, or the rash, or the fools, but by the sage, the philosopher, and the high-principled. Evidently there must be some physical and mental effect which man craves and for which Nature has made provision. Science shows that tobacco is both a stimulant and a narcotic, simultaneously spurring and soothing the system. This is why so many literary men find it an aid to their labors, why most men desire it after a meal, and why the "pipe of peace" has become proverbial. You probably cannot understand this, because brought up from childhood free from its infection, but millions otherwise brought up *do* understand it, and you ought to recognize that fact. Besides, there is a certain *camaraderie* in smoking which elicits an immediate good-feeling and fellowship, as any smoker will tell you. Animosities seem to abate and sympathies to well up, and there comes a blessed season of good-will towards fellow-creatures, like the Deacon's in *Elsie Venner*. You have contributed nothing to this, perhaps have not even witnessed it, but such is the fact.

Whether tobacco has "certain qualities protective in studying Occultism," the FORUM is unable to say. It can hardly even speculate as to whether the "protection" is against Elementals, or Black Magic, or the Dweller of the Threshold, or as to how a cigar in such cases would operate. But that tobacco is not condemned by the highest authorities, or of necessity perilous to spiritual advance, would seem clear from the habits of those nearest to Them. The three Founders of the T. S. are all smokers, and of these the one who is an Initiate says that "tobacco keeps her alive." Damodar did not despise an occasional smoke, and many, perhaps most, of the active workers and writers at the Adyar and the London Headquarters partake freely of the "poison" and hospitably "transmit" it. All this may seem very dreadful, but it is oniy fact, and "There is no religion higher than truth." And as some of these eminent Theosophists are Buddhists, and very con-

scientious ones, giving, moreover, no indication of any abuse worked upon their wit, it looks as if they did not understand the precept to have the scope imputed to it by the questioner.

Now the FORUM insists not that you shall forthwith buy a pipe or even attempt a cigarette. But it does insist that you must not make your personal dislikes a universal human rule, or restrict the liberty of conscience and act which other Theosophists have no less than you, or make faces or call names when they use it. Hold fast to your preferences, but reason yourself out of your prejudices; and when you find yourself in danger of posing superior to a great majority of the human family, plus a large section of the T. S. and all of its Founders, suspect that you may be wrong. It may be that obstinate self-assertion is even now barring your way to loftier heights. What if your attitude to tobacco is doing you more harm than his ever did to an occultist, and that for you—paradoxical as it may seem—smoke is impeding sanctification!

W. Q. J.—I should like very much to know who is that F. T. S. who "defends the use of tobacco as a protective in studying Occultism," for he or she cannot know what protection means or Occultism either. The Editor of the FORUM has well answered the question, since the sentence I refer to, being only narrative, is not a question. Yet it is important as pointing to error of a vital sort. There are hundreds of Hindû occultists who never have indulged in tobacco; but they have not interdicted it to others. They protect themselves by means that can only be used in the plane where such protection is needful, and that is the plane where neither tobacco nor sentiment on that or any other subject has place. Tobacco may protect the carcass from germs of disease, but that security to safety is needed by all men, whether they are studying Occultism or not. The whole question of tobacco or no tobacco is purely material. It has been discovered that it does not degrade except by abuse, but at the same time it was found and declared that other narcotics and stimulants, such as hemp, opium, and spirits, do dynamically obstruct and spiritually degrade. Hence these tears —and tobacco.

QUESTION LXXVIII.

Mr. Sinnett says: "It is not the goody-good or devoutly aspiring man that attains to the highest development." What is the highest development, and how best attained?

Ans.—Theosophy contemplates man as a whole. It omits no part of his complex nature, and hence considers exhaustively the origin and purpose of each, as well as the *rationale* and law of his upward evolution. This is because the principle of Life is One, and though we may analyze its departments, we are not to sever them.

We do sever them if we take one and place the spring to evolution in it alone. Aspiration after the Divine likeness is the finest of human energies, but by itself it does not uplift to that likeness. The whole higher nature, not only the aspirational part of it, needs development. Intellect, the moral sense, judgment, self-command,—these and allied qualities have symmetrically to expand. The devotional spirit alone, without intelligence or disciplined character, would not be an outfit for an Adept, still less for a god. A Methodist exhorter has it; so has a clergyman of Evangelical beliefs and gentle manners; so has many a private citizen who is small in his ideas, selfish in his habits, and mean in his expenditures. It is very common among women whose routine, whether social or religious, is of the flimsiest quality, and whose opinions on any subject are as worthless as their lives. It marks a whole class of men whom we respect as conscientious, but from whom advice or suggestion would seem ludicrous. It is conspicuous in all religious bigots, eminently so in religious persecutors. It is compatible with ignorance, conceit, inexperience, pettiness, narrowness, intolerance, selfishness, self-deception, stupidity, meanness, and a variety of other unamiable and unsavory traits which we see exhibited in differing combinations. To say that a man is "devout" is by no means to say that he is just, or generous, or large-minded, or well-instructed, or judicious, or self-restrained. It would certainly be unfair to allege that piety excludes these qualities, but a large induction from the religious world *as we see it in this age* would probably justify the assertion that a relig-

ious man has a *tendency* to exhibit their opposites. At all events, nobody ever supposes that his religion fits him for any valuable relation to the spheres of business or public life or practical affairs, or gives his opinions on any topic the slightest suggestion of deeper thought or better culture. Indeed, there is a wide-spread suspicion that it does not even conduce to moral firmness or banish moral evil.

It may be said that the *true* religious spirit would include all other merits and make a man all that he should be. Very possibly; but this could only be if the conventional divorce between religion and ethics was annulled, and if a wholly new conception of religion itself was introduced. In such case, it being seen that the supremacy of the spiritual nature is the desideratum, everything incongruous with that would be discountenanced, and so all selfishness, injustice, narrowness, and trickery would become irreligious.

The "highest development" of man's nature must refer to the whole of it, and not to any one part or parts. It can hardly be that certain virtues are to be pushed upwards till they rise like mountain peaks above low plains or deep abysses, but rather that all departments of the being are to be steadily uplifted till the whole nature is a lofty plateau of excellence. Above everything else, an Adept is symmetrical. "All steps are necessary to make up the ladder," says *Light on the Path.*

As to how this "highest development" is best attained, one who is not a teacher must speak with diffidence. Yet it may perhaps be correct to say that the first requisite is a clear conception of the end sought, the goal pursued. Let us call this "the transformation of the human into the divine." The means to this is evidently the practice of everything which furthers it. Knowledge, intelligence, self-control, patience, beneficence, breadth of view and sympathy,—these and kindred qualities need the full expansion which comes from incessant use. The incessant use finds its sphere in the daily work of life, to which is added the private culture carried on by the devout and earnest. Thus it would seem that the best way to attain the highest development is to make all the incidents and experiences of life steps to it, plus the deliberate and special

training expounded in the books intended for aspirants. Both ideas are repeatedly stated and amplified in the various publications which Theosophists understand to have been prompted by those who know.

W. Q. J.—I should like to add that Mr. Sinnett had in view the doctrine found in many books old and new that wisdom as well as virtue is needed in him who aspires to the "highest development." Virtue leads only to heaven, wisdom leads to union with the whole. But wisdom must at last have virtue as companion. Virtue pursued and practiced through many lives will lead at last to wisdom, yet wisdom first attained makes the cultivation of virtue easier. The highest development cannot be attained in any single incarnation. The teachers say that we must seek the company of those who are pure and wise, who lead holy lives, and that we must look for knowledge with persistency, humbleness, and faith, and that thus setting our feet upon the path the goal will loom in sight after many weary struggles.

QUESTION LXXIX.

"*Every wrong action must pay its penalty in its own kind before we can get clear of it.*" (*Path for November*, 1887, *page* 239.) *What does this mean?*

Ans.—It means that punishment follows naturally on the line of the offense, that it is not arbitrary or fanciful, but has a logical and necessary connection with the offense itself. Wherever nature has free course and is not thwarted by social artificialties, we see this tendency. A man is extravagant and improvident: he comes to poverty. Another is a debauchee: his physical strength gives way and he undergoes prostration and disease. Another is hard and merciless: he gets no pity in his hour of need. A fourth is deceitful: he forfeits confidence. A fifth embezzles the property of others: nobody trusts him thereafter. A sixth is spiteful and malicious: he is sent to Coventry. A seventh is quarrelsome and bloodthirsty: his life is ended by violence. These various offenses set in motion human instincts

and other forces which appropriately rebound on the offender and vindicate justice in a direct way. If a treacherous person broke his leg, we could hardly consider it a punishment, for there is no apparent connection between the wrong and the suffering; but if a termagant ruptured a blood-vessel or a bully had his skull cracked, the connection is clear.

Similarly in more recondite regions. Mental habits are formed by the iterated use of one line of thought or imagination, and become so fixed as to require great force and time for correction. Now if a man allows himself to grow censorious, irritable, sensitive, suspicious, or in any other way reverses the normal attitude towards his fellows, he provides his own punishment by thus ensuring that constant wounds shall be given to the inflamed surface. No exterior agency is needed to sentence him; he sentences himself and executes the sentence along the line of the wrong. More than this,—he ensures that the punishment shall continue till the reform, for only by steady abrogation of the habit will the self-inflicted discipline die out. This certainty of congruous penalty is one reason why Theosophy so deprecates selfishness. The selfish man is ever on the alert for advantages, and therefore ever the victim of disappointments; his attention being concentred on his own sensibilities, he is never outside the range of annoyance.

On higher planes still, the same principle holds. It is the complaint of Theosophy that modern civilization has lost hold on spiritual truths and abandoned their corresponding ideals for those of mere physical strength or knowledge. Justice, equity, the maintenance of human right and Divine law have been waived before considerations of self-interest or fancied policy. The wrong action has paid its penalty in its own kind. Nations and classes are all antagonized, and the consequent taxation for war purposes keeps millions in misery and want, while no one is free from suspicion and foreboding. There will never be peace or plenty or happiness till the whole policy is reversed, and the only hope of that lies in insistance on the doctrine of Karma as embodying all national and social guidance.

That we will never get clear of wrong actions till they pay their penalty in its own kind is illustrated in criminal jurisprud-

ence. Present punishment consists of two sorts, fine and imprisonment, neither having any relation to the offense. Wife-beaters, cut-throats, brutal ruffians of all types are put in jail—sometimes. There is little in this to induce abstinence thereafter, and nothing to force home a sense of the suffering they have caused by outrage. But suppose that the theory of ruffians being refined gentlemen whose sensibilities are on no account to be wounded was thrown aside, and the plan adopted of making them undergo the very evil they have inflicted. One thorough scourging would stop more assaults than a dozen sentences to imprisonment. The Mosaic infliction of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" went straight to the essence of the matter, and taught evil-doers that they must not perpetrate what they would not undergo. No otherwise can the lesson of respect for others be brought home to a criminal, and the sickly sentimentality which refuses to see this has covered the land with prisons and the honest man with taxation,—neither resulting in any adequate protection to person or goods. And here again, Karma in the criminal code, no less than Karma in national ethics and in individual relations, is the only sure guard against increasing wrong and expanding suffering. In fact, the very refusal of society to suppress violence by analogous discipline to the violent exhibits the truth of the passage quoted in the Question, for that refusal has been punished by a constant growth of violent offenses and a greater insecurity to social order.

QUESTION LXXX.

Has any Theosophical theory been advanced in regard to the atmospheric and electrical disturbances so prevalent in this country during the last few years?

W. Q. J.—Some theories have been advanced by theosophists respecting the great atmospheric and electrical disturbances, but they are not specially confined to that; they include other great changes, and reach over into the realm of thought and the minor changes in the race. Atmospheric and electrical changes occur at all times, and are intensified at certain periods.

The changes of the great cycles—from one to another—make all sorts of upheavals possible. The sun moving slowly in his great orbit carries the small earth's path out into new fields of space where entirely new cosmic conditions are met with, and the sun also goes through alterations of place and state. These latter must affect our atmosphere and electrical condition, for it is held by some theosophists that the sun is our great source of electricity. Science has lately admitted the possibility of there being an actual connection between spots on the sun and our great electric storms; the old Hindû astrologers always asserted this, for they claimed that, as the sun altered, so did the condition of the earth. But it would be premature to definitely state either that the sun causes the changes alone, or that they are due to a different situation of the earth in her great path through space.

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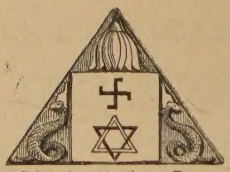

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